



CITY ATTORNEY

Recruitment Announcement

The Ideal Candidate

For this important role the City of Bellingham seeks an experienced, unifying leader who is deeply committed to the success of the city and is a strategic big-picture thinker. The ideal candidate will have a passion for public service and will lead by example to gain the confidence of the public and staff. Integrity that aligns with the city's organizational values is essential.

The ideal candidate will demonstrate high ethical standards and recognize appropriate times to reach out to outside counsel. The City Attorney must be accessible, approachable, personable, and possess strong writing skills. Confidence and objectivity are qualities important to success in this position.



About the City

Bellingham, Washington is among the most beautiful and vibrant communities in the country. We have a small city vibe combined with big city events and activities, natural beauty and recreation galore, all nestled between the Cascade Mountains and the San Juan Islands. A short distance to both Seattle and Vancouver, BC, Bellingham is the recipient of an extensive list of awards, including many designations as a “best place” for livability, outdoor adventures and leadership in sustainability.



Recreation, Arts and Culture: Known as a recreation destination, Bellingham has invested for decades in a top-notch system of parks and trails. Within easy reach are world-class skiing, sailing, kayaking, mountain biking, climbing, and hiking. It’s truly an outdoor lover’s paradise. With a thriving arts scene, unique shopping districts, and a plethora of local eateries, breweries and more, there’s something for everyone in the urban center. From the live productions at the Mount Baker Theatre to the Smithsonian-affiliated Whatcom Museum, independent cinema at the Pickford Film Center, and music, art, comedy and other offerings at venues throughout the community, Bellingham proudly supports an active and innovative culture of arts and entertainment.



Housing and Neighborhoods: Bellingham is among the fastest growing cities in the Pacific Northwest. With an eye toward sustainable growth, the city has preserved its historic roots and has connections to the Indigenous nations who have called this land home since time immemorial. While looking to the future, walkable, bikeable neighborhoods and urban villages are spread throughout the city. You’ll find neighborhoods with distinct character and housing styles: regal Victorians, waterfront hideaways, country farmhouses, condominiums, traditional single-family homes, and thoughtfully planned new developments.

Education: Education stands tall in Bellingham, with a well-supported, well-funded, acclaimed K-12 public education system in our Bellingham Public Schools. Public higher education institutions including Western Washington University, Northwest Indian College and two community colleges also call our area home, adding vibrancy and diversity to our community and offering an array of programs, including exciting community and continuing education options, ensuring people of all ages have opportunities for lifelong learning.

This is just a small sample of what’s great about Bellingham!
Learn more:

- [Local tourism agency, Visit Bellingham](#)
- [City of Bellingham website](#)



Bellingham City Government

The City of Bellingham is committed to our vision of being a safe, sustainable and equitable community where current and future generations can thrive. Like many communities, we face challenges and opportunities that define and inspire our City government's important work in achieving this vision.

Current priorities for the City include increasing housing options, promoting sustainable growth, addressing climate change, inspiring and empowering a service-oriented workforce, ensuring strong fiscal stewardship, strengthening community engagement, and maintaining a safe and welcoming community for everyone.

These and other priorities are in addition to providing a full suite of excellent municipal services that include public safety, economic development, environmental stewardship and remediation, street and multi-modal transportation infrastructure, utilities, culture and recreation activities, general government services, and much more.

Activities owned and/or operated by the City include water, wastewater and stormwater facilities, 300 miles of streets, county-wide emergency medical services, municipal parking facilities, a golf course, a cemetery, a museum, a four-branch library, nearly 100 parks, an athletic complex with a stadium, an aquatic center and multiple athletic fields.

One City Approach

We are passionate about a One City approach to the City's work. To meet today's challenges we must harness innovation, expertise and creativity across the City's departments and branches of government.

One City is our vision for a community-first approach to providing local government services. To the community we serve, we are "One City," accountable as a whole for delivering excellent service and good government. A key initiative of the Mayor, One City is both an ethos of service and a practical approach to all our collective work.





Organizational Structure

The City Charter establishes a Mayor-Council form of government, with the City administration led by an elected Mayor in a strong-Mayor system.

Our seven-member City Council serves as our legislative, policy-making branch of government. An elected judge presides over Bellingham Municipal Court as our judicial branch.

The City Attorney is a Charter position appointed by and serving at the discretion of the Mayor, with City Council approval. The City Attorney directly supervises legal department staff and may delegate supervisory authority as deemed appropriate. The org chart can be located at [City of Bellingham Org. Chart](#).

The Mayor heads an administrative operation that includes overseeing approximately 1035 full-time employees and an added 50 seasonal workers. There are nine collective bargaining units. The City ensures the effective delivery of essential municipal services through an overall budget in 2025 of \$548.9 million, which includes \$122.2 million for general funding operations. The 2026 budget includes an overall budget of \$543 million, including \$128.6 million for general funding operations.



About the City Attorney's Office

The City Attorney serves as chief legal advisor to the Council, the Mayor and all City departments; represents the City in legal proceedings, including the prosecutorial function before Municipal Court. This position provides leadership and general administrative oversight to the City's 15.75 FTE Legal Department and contributes as a member of the City's senior management team on strategy and policy.



The City Attorney

The City Attorney will provide strategic leadership, direction and oversight to the City Attorney's Office and its employees. They will develop and implement programs and policies and support the City's goals to enhance organizational effectiveness, foster a positive work environment and contribute to the City's long-term successes and financial stability. The City Attorney serves as a member of the City's executive management team and will work collaboratively with the Executive Department, City Council and other City departments on strategy and policy to ensure that the City's mission and core values are incorporated into operational activities and services. They will coordinate and provide comprehensive professional municipal legal services for the City with a focus on option-based advice. The City Attorney will effectively engage and collaborate with community members; local, state, federal agencies; and tribal nations to ensure City government is effectively serving its community and partners.

Key Responsibilities include:

- **Leadership:** Serves as a member of the City's senior leadership team. Provides information and advice to the Mayor, City Council, and leadership team on strategic planning and accomplishment of City mission goals and objectives. Coordinates the Department's activities with those of other City departments and offices to ensure a consistent approach towards common projects and interests and the cost-effective delivery of services.
- **Legal Department Management:** Plans, organizes, directs, and evaluates the work of the Legal Department, including providing legal counsel to the elected officials and City departments, prosecuting crimes and misdemeanors under municipal law, and overseeing the City's risk management and liability and property and insurance programs.
- **Legal Counsel:** Directly or through staff, researches federal, state and local laws and regulations, and issues legal opinions and provides option based legal counsel to the elected and appointed officials of the City and to various City boards and commissions. Maintains close liaison with the Mayor, City Council, City departments, boards and commissions.

Staffs or attends all regular City Council meetings, and committee meetings to provide legal guidance to elected officials.

- **Legal Documents:** Drafts legal documents on behalf of the City, including ordinances, resolutions, code provisions, contracts, and other legal instruments. Approves as to form and content all City legal documents prior to execution by the Mayor or other approving authority. Oversees the preparation, maintenance, and updating of the City Municipal Code and related documents.
- **Litigation:** Directly or through staff, brings legal action on behalf of the City. Defends the City, its officials and employees acting on behalf of the City, when charged with violation of law or regulation. Hires special (outside) legal counsel to provide special expertise or to handle exceptional legal workload.
- **City Prosecutor:** Directly or through staff, prosecutes criminal violations before the Municipal Court. Works cooperatively with law enforcement agencies to deal with patterns of criminal activity and code violations. Recommends code provisions to address nuisance, disruptive, or criminal behavior in the City.



- **Risk Management:** Oversees the City's risk management and loss liability programs. Recommends levels and types of liability insurance coverage and procures necessary insurance protection; recommends and manages self-insured liability coverage and funds; and provides for efficient claims processing and management. Works with City departments to review liability risk situations and to manage and reduce City exposure to adverse claims. Develops accident review and claims risk assessment response programs.
- **Other Core Responsibilities:** The City Attorney, directly or through staff, is also responsible for contributing to state and federal government relations and tribal relations initiatives; supporting effective communications, media relations and community engagement; organization-wide policy development, and sound fiscal and business management practices.

Required Qualifications

The successful candidate will be a graduate from an accredited four-year college and a law school accredited by the American Bar Association. The candidate must be licensed to practice law in the State of Washington, be in good standing with the Washington State Bar Association and have at least three years of experience in legal practice in the state of Washington. The candidate will possess at least five years of combined legal experience as a city attorney, assistant city attorney, deputy prosecuting attorney, and or other relevant law practice with at least two years of that experience in municipal law. The candidate must also have two or more years of demonstrated experience in a management position. An equivalent combination of education and experience sufficient to provide the candidate with the knowledge, skill and ability to successfully perform the essential functions of the job will be considered.



Desirable Qualifications

- Significant Litigation and Trial experience.
- Demonstrated creativity and innovation in programs and processes.
- More than two years of demonstrated experience in a management position.

The preferred candidate will have experience and demonstrated success in the following areas:

- Visionary and strategic leadership.
- Excellent interpersonal skills for establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with staff, other departments, elected officials, the media, and the public.
- Highly effective team building and leadership skills including consensus-building to resolve conflicts, negotiate agreements and gain cooperation among competing interest groups.
- Skilled in litigation and in trial work and in negotiating settlements and agreements in the best interests of the City.
- Establish and maintain cooperative and effective working relationships with elected officials and staff, law enforcement, legal and court officials and partners, both internal and external.
- Effectively apply legal knowledge and skills in the context of the operation of municipal government and the development of public policy and laws.
- Identify the Department’s future direction in response to changing City needs, and to develop, implement, and monitor appropriate plans, schedules, and action steps.
- Interpreting and appropriately applying complex codes, regulations, legal documents, policies and procedures and explaining these to clients.
- Customer service and the ability to mentor, coach and direct the work of staff.
- Cultural competency that enables effective working relationships in cross-cultural situations.
- Successful planning and implementation of change management strategies, within the department and Citywide, including support for breaking down organizational silos.
- Creative problem solver, bringing fresh ideas and a progressive approach.
- Fostering a positive environment where collaboration thrives, encouraging team members to share their expertise and contribute to shared goals.
- Providing option-based advice to the Council, the Mayor and all City department leadership in support of the overall Citywide strategic plans and initiatives.
- Building a culture of accountability and professional growth within the Legal Department and the broader City organization.



Total Compensation

The annual salary range for this position is \$177,624 – \$222,000. Employees receive step increases biennially in accordance with the [E-Team Handbook](#) and City policy.

At the City of Bellingham, we offer a comprehensive benefits package that helps you thrive in both your career and personal life. Join our team and enjoy peace of mind knowing that you and your loved ones are well cared for. Here's a closer look at the outstanding benefits that come with being part of our team. You can find more details on our employment [benefits page](#) and in the [E-Team Handbook](#).

- 20 hours of vacation leave per month, with increased accrual over time
- 12 paid holidays + 1 floating holiday per year
- 40 hours of sick leave upon hire + 8 hours accrued monthly
- Medical, dental, and vision insurance for employees and their families
- Life insurance and long-term disability coverage
- Flexible spending accounts and medical insurance opt-out program
- Access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Washington State Retirement plan (DRS) for retirement security
- Optional 457 deferred compensation savings plan and 401(a) Retirement Savings Plan up to 3% with employer match

Leave accruals are based on 1.0 FTE and require employees to be in paid status at least 120 hours/month.

The City of Bellingham is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We do not make decisions on the basis of an individual's race, religion, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, age (40+), disability, retaliation, sexual orientation or gender identity, honorably discharged veteran or military status, status as a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability, or any other basis prohibited by local, state, or federal law. All are encouraged to apply for employment.



APPLICATION PROCESS

If you are interested in this position, submit a cover letter and a resume by visiting www.karrasconsulting.net and clicking on “view open positions.”

If you have questions regarding this announcement, please call Marissa Karras at 360-956-1336. This position will remain open until filled but the screening process will move quickly. In order to be considered for the first round of interviews please submit your application materials at www.karrasconsulting.net no later than April 30, 2026.

